

Rachel Gramer
Teaching Statement

Two years ago, I articulated this story about my experiences teaching at a public high school and two-year college in Florida:

Some old stories

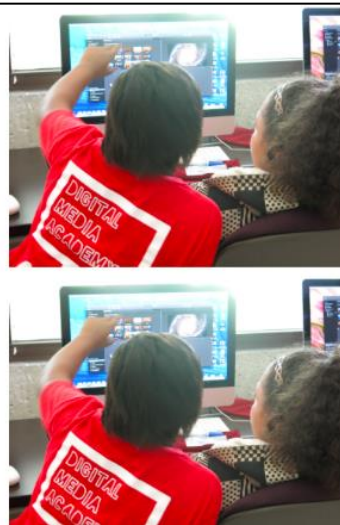
I used to teach grammar like it mattered most.
I thought I was supposed to uphold rigid standards of language correctness.
I thought academic writing and creativity were discrete because they *were*, not because we construct them as such.
I wanted classroom control over what my students did because I thought that was an effective way to guide their learning.
I thought I could teach function by teaching form.



At that time, I also articulated this story about my experiences as a doctoral student and feminist teacher, mentor, and researcher at a four-year metropolitan university in Louisville:

Some new stories

I now think learning matters most.
I think I am supposed to support my students in learning how to learn and how to communicate that learning to others.
I am happy to show my students how academic writing is a set of constructs, not givens, though certainly as constructs they have power.
I still want effective ways to guide learning, but I know that control is not the best way. And I know I was never really in control anyway.
I now encourage openness and risk-taking by modeling those behaviors and being honest with my students.



Two years later, my teaching story is still much more akin to the latter than the former, with a renewed commitment to supporting students in enacting stories that speak back to power in ways that are meaningful for them. I believe deeply that we are all constrained and enabled by the stories we are told and are telling, the stories we have internalized and are externalizing right now. In the contemporary writing classroom, in continued climates of hate and misunderstanding surrounding myriad difference, the power of story is especially vital because so many students are still being told limiting stories about what discourses are meant for them and what writing they are capable of, whether they are women and men of color, women or young girls, first generation college students, or English language learners. One of my greatest strengths as a feminist writing teacher is that I work to create and maintain relatively safe spaces of low-stakes experimentation and collaboration that encourage students to see themselves as capable, more confident writers who are learning by participating in a community of other writers. By providing low barriers for entry and consistent collaborative peer support, my pedagogy supports students in learning to tell more agentive stories than many that circulate about them, in and through collaborative multimodal composition practices for lifelong writing habits.

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As a feminist writing teacher, I create explicit structures of support that facilitate undergraduate students' active learning and peer collaboration in both multimodal composition practices and contemporary rhetorical education. Students in my courses make visible—and learn together to value—diverse multimodal composing practices as part of a rhetorical education foregrounding audience and context. In every class meeting, students work together to create texts that mediate their learning of tough concepts for each project. Whether being introduced to rhetoric for the first time or figuring out how to frame research questions about equity, students create multimodal texts across multiple genres for specific audiences as a matter of everyday practice. For example, in a recent research-intensive writing course, students shared interactive slides to teach classmates about a specific research method; created multimodal reflections on their research and writing process-in-progress for themselves and for me; and composed and revised infographics with original visual figures to present to a public audience at the Celebration of Student Writing. Such co-constructed knowledge-making practices made visible students' research processes and results—about black infant mortality rates, misunderstandings of global nutrition, perceptions of sexism from local businesswomen of color—and our low-stakes experimentation also increased students' motivation to participate in mixed methods research as part of their rhetorical futures. Thanks to my diverse teaching and professional experience—at a public high school, two-year college, four-year research and regional universities, and local publishing industries—I am prepared to enact feminist multimodal pedagogies in introductory and advanced undergrad writing courses in academic, digital, and professional writing.

My graduate courses also create a culture of collaboration and encouragement in which graduate students who are writing teachers feel supported in seeing themselves as more comfortable, confident composers across rhetorical genres and domains. In my current graduate pedagogy course, graduate student instructors mediate their learning as composition teachers by engaging in similar collaborative, multimodal composition strategies during each class. In small groups, they contribute to an archive of shared texts and resources, teaching each other about specific program outcomes via active learning strategies and activities designed for first-year students. Recently, they also collectively compiled research on diverse college student populations into interactive slides for all writing instructors (and indeed, any faculty) at our institution, complete with academic and popular research as well as institution-specific statistics on, and resources for, students with disabilities, with children, with jobs, with chronic illness, and so on. In this course, just as importantly as learning together and sharing that learning with others, graduate student instructors learn to view students as complex audiences for the teaching genres they compose. To work toward this end, we dedicate course time for peer review of teaching materials so that, as new teachers, they give and receive feedback on project prompts, schedules, and rubrics—reflecting on what's assumed in their own texts and how their materials are designed for students as a specific audience of readers. Thanks to my diverse research and administrative experience—in qualitative research, in community projects, in specialized doctoral coursework, in mentoring and teaching new writing teachers—I am prepared to teach graduate courses in research methods, writing pedagogy, narrative, multimodal and digital literacies, rhetorical genre studies, and digital storytelling. And I am grateful for the privilege to enact feminist pedagogies in graduate and undergraduate education, engaging all learners as social beings in collaborative composing environments that support them in telling stories that matter.